

ALIEN GANG CRIME IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

Good afternoon honored members of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee and guests. It is a pleasure to be back in our Nation's Capitol in the springtime. My name is Marsha Garst and I am the Commonwealth's Attorney of Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg. Except for my time at the University of Virginia and here in Washington, D.C., I have also been a lifelong resident of Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg. Five (5) generations of my family have made their home in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley and as I now raise my own family there, it is with a great sense of urgency that I ask you to address the Alien Gang crime problem in the Valley of Virginia before our way of life is lost forever.

As was the case with my family, many immigrants have migrated to the Shenandoah Valley for the abundance of jobs and the quality of living. Most recently, many immigrants have come to Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg to seek employment in our burgeoning poultry industry and agricultural economy. Currently, the City of Harrisonburg is second in the state for English as a Second Language (ESL) education and has over fifty-six(56) different countries of origin and thirty-eight (38) different spoken languages in our public school system. Spanish as the primary language makes

up seventy-two (72) percent of the ESL program attendees. Most immigrants to the community have contributed to the positive growth and well being of our town. However, I am here to address the dangerous minority - that is alien gang members that have come to prey on other immigrants and citizens.

When I began prosecution as in 1994, organized gangs were unheard of and new drug- methamphetamine was making its way to our streets. In 1994, we had 160 students in the ESL program in the City of Harrisonburg. In 2004, we had 1,422 students in the ESL program. We first heard of a gang called MS-13 in 1999 when we apprehended two (2) members of the gang wanted on malicious wounding charges who were staying with family members in Harrisonburg after fleeing Fairfax County.

Our next contact with MS-13 came in August of 2003. Virginia State Police members and Fairfax County Investigators, advised us that a woman by the name of Brenda Paz had been living in Harrisonburg, Virginia, with family members. Ms. Paz served as a point of contact for MS-13 gang members. As many of you know, she later cooperated against other MS-13 gang members and was found brutally murdered in the adjoining county of Shenandoah. Ms. Paz was also pregnant.

Later in 2003, another young woman from Harrisonburg, Virginia died due to her gang contacts when her boyfriend and she were stealing cars in Northern Virginia for MS-13 and died in a car crash. This young woman's surviving sister, who was only 14 years of age at the time, was charged after her sister's death with vandalism and gang participation due to her alliance with MS-13.

Currently, the City of Harrisonburg and County of Rockingham has a Gang Task Force. This task force has a coordinator with who I have worked for a decade, Sgt. Chris Rush - I would like to introduce him at the time - he was instrumental in providing the following details: The City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County has ten (10) active gangs with over one-hundred (100) documented members.

The Sureños 13 are currently the most powerful gang over forty (40) members strong. This gang draws its ranks from Mexican citizens. They are comprised of at least seventy-five (75) percent illegal aliens and have been tied to malicious woundings, firearms violations, robberies, abductions, assaults, breaking and enterings, larcenies, and vandalisms in our community. One sad case of note was a fifteen (15) year old sister of a Sureños 13 member was stabbed by a MS-13 member and presented at school with stab wounds, but her family would not cooperate with the prosecution of her

attacker because of the families' illegal status and gang ties. Another case of note is the 2004 case of abduction and robbery wherein Sur 13 members went to the home of a CRIPS member and held residents at gunpoint and robbed residents. Several illegal aliens participated in this attack, but could not be prosecuted due to the lack of cooperation of the victims. The case was dismissed because the victim told his mother he was afraid of SUR 13 members and refused to testify. The abduction and robbery were retaliation for a drug debt. We have also had numerous home invasions of illegal alien homes and citizens by SUR 13. SUR 13 knows that victims will not prosecute because of their illegal status and many cases go unreported.

Our next powerful gang is MS-13 with twenty-five (25) documented local resident members. Approximately fifty (50) percent of these members are illegal aliens. The rest are here on political asylum from El Salvador. This does not include the many MS-13 members that travel down from Northern Virginia to participate in criminal activities. In Harrisonburg and the County of Rockingham, we have had malicious woundings, firearms violation, assault, larcenies, and vandalisms or taggings. One recent case of note, in February 2005, a MS-13 member was assaulted with a broken bottle. This MS-13 member went and got two (2) friends, one

with gang ties, and returned and discharged several ammunitions into the area of the crowd where he was assaulted.

Below, please find examples of the gang markings. The first Photograph depicts a tagging on the door of public housing complex - Harris Gardens, in the City of Harrisonburg. It depicts a SUR 13 member executing a local rival gang member. The second photograph depicts a SUR 13 member so proud he would wear his markings in a permanent tattoo.



The first photograph below depicts a common gang tattoo. The second photograph depicts a large tagging by SUR 13.



The photographs below depict recent taggings on well known MS -13 Turf.



Finally, we have evidence from local teachers of the second grade that gang recruiting for MS-13 and SUR 13 has already begun. The photograph below depicts local school children on a field trip to our Nation's Capitol flashing gang signs. This picture was copied from one of our local yearbooks in the Harrisonburg area.



Illegal aliens makeup a significant portion of gang members in the Shenandoah Valley. Within the past month, a list of ten (10) gang members was given to our local ICE office. Out of these ten members, two (2) had all ready been deported and have re-entered the United States and three (3) are awaiting criminal charges and upon conviction will be deported because of their illegal status. There are also other documented cases in which our local police officers have encountered gang members/associates who had been deported and re-entered and were re-arrested.

A dangerous nexus is about to occur. Approximately forty (40) percent of methamphetamine seized in the State of Virginia was seized in Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg. Already Shenandoah County has seen gang activity tied to methamphetamine. The City of Harrisonburg and the County of Rockingham are currently seeing gang members in possession of and distributing narcotics. However, it does not appear at this time they are doing it for the benefit of the gang, but for the benefit of their individual gain. Once gangs decide to use the valley drug trade as a profit base, then we will truly have a crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this very serious problem and thank you for your time.

